

Doctors who spread COVID misinformation can easily renew their medical licenses | NPR

By Geoff Brumfiel

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For much of the pandemic, Dr. Lee Merritt has appeared on talk shows and in lecture halls to spread false information about COVID-19.

Among her claims: that the SARS-CoV2 virus is a genetically engineered bioweapon (the U.S. intelligence community says it's not). And that vaccination dramatically increases the risk of death from COVID (data show an enormous drop in risk for those who take the vaccine). The entire pandemic, she says in public lectures, is a vast global conspiracy to exert social control.

And yet, in October, she was able to renew her medical license in the state of Nebraska. Documents obtained through a public records request by NPR showed it took just a few clicks: 12 yes-or-no questions answered online allowed her to extend her license for another year.

Critics say that Merritt's renewal is another example of how the nation's state medical boards are failing to protect the public from a small minority of doctors spreading COVID falsehoods.

"State medical boards, for the main part, have been cozy clubs of people who feel their job is to protect the profession," says Imran Ahmed, the CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a group that tracks vaccine misinformation online.

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